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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [KPAO](#) [PINS](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: PRT SALAH AD DIN: INDEPENDENT MEDIA FACE
INTIMIDATION

Classified By: SALAH AD DIN PRT LEADER RICK BELL FOR REASONS 1.4 (a) AND (d).

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Salah ad Din reporting cable.

SUMMARY

¶2. (SBU) Government officials and insurgents continue to intimidate and harass journalists in Salah ad Din (SaD). Many journalists associate themselves with powerful clients who can offer protection, such as political parties and tribal or religious groups. This severely limits journalists' independence, objectivity, and range of reporting. The few nascent "independent" media organizations in the province rely largely on CF funding. Independent, market-driven media have not yet taken root. END SUMMARY.

SAD JOURNALISTS FACE INTIMIDATION

¶3. (C) Iraqi journalists working in SaD tell the PRT they face intimidation from insurgents. Muhammed Hussein of Coalition Forces (CF)-funded Free Iraqi Radio (protect throughout) reports that anonymous phone threats have forced him to change his phone number three times. He attributes the threats to the funding CF provide his organization, but adds that even without American funding, insurgents would target journalists because they see independent media as an American initiative.

¶4. (C) Hussein said independent journalists feel particularly vulnerable because they have no protection from the government: local authorities often respond to media criticism with threats and reprisals. Hussein said that, in 2007, local police frequently arrested and beat journalists for unfavorable reporting on their activities. He noted that the situation has improved in 2008 and the number of arrests and beatings has declined. However, not only the police work to limit media independence: a Director General in SaD told Hussein not to report negative stories on the Government of Iraq (GOI). Because of threats, Hussein estimated that at least 75 percent of the journalists in SaD have associated themselves with a protector--either a tribal leader or government official--and are forced by the relationship to push their client's message instead of reporting independently. Hussein said he has received several offers to work for such protectors but prefers to remain independent.

¶5. (C) Sheikh Hassan Al-Khzraji (protect throughout) owns the "Dujayl Echo," a private-sector newspaper in the town of Ad-Dujayl in SaD, which employs six reporters. Sheikh Hassan is the top Sheikh in the area, and he uses his tribal connections to protect his paper's employees from insurgents. Sheikh Hassan told the PRT an insurgent would "think 1,000 times over" before threatening any member of his staff, because of the newspaper's tribal connections.

¶6. (C) But tribal protection works less well against threats from government officials. Hassan said that, in early 2008,

a local official threatened one of his reporters who had criticized the official in the paper; the reporter was so intimidated that he quit his job the next day and fled the city in fear of his life. Hassan told the PRT that, although threats against journalists had declined over the last year as security has improved, SaD journalists still face threats from local militias, insurgents, and government officials.

17. (C) The only television station in SaD, Salah ad Din TV (a satellite station), was established with CF funding. It is now privately owned. The Provincial Council (PC) Chairman and several members of the PC have complained that the station should belong to "the people and their elected representatives." He publicly upbraided the owner for "biased coverage." Still, the Chairman appears to have done Q"biased coverage." Still, the Chairman appears to have done no more than to express displeasure.

COMMENT

18. (C) Freedom of the press has yet to take firm hold in SaD. Independent journalists in the province are rare and largely reliant on CF support. SaD's handful of media organizations (radio stations, province-wide or community-focused newspapers, and a TV station) suffer from indifferent-to-hostile treatment from government officials, who sometimes use security forces to intimidate journalists. Even if officials do nothing more than complain about media reporting, the effect contributes--intentionally or not--to intimidation of the province's media. END COMMENT.

CROCKER